



History of the Virginia Department of Business Assistance

The Virginia Department of Business Assistance was formed as the Department of Business Assistance on July 1, 1996. An act of the General Assembly split the Department of Economic Development into two newly created entities: the Virginia Economic Partnership (VEDP) and the Department of Business Assistance (DBA). VEDP would attract new business to Virginia; DBA would serve Virginia's existing business community and provide some services for business attraction.

The Department of Business Assistance added "Virginia" to its name in 2006, becoming VDBA.

The Department of Business Assistance consisted of the following operating divisions in 1996: Existing Industry, Small Business and Virginia Small Business Finance Authority (VSBFA), and Workforce Services. Existing Industry managed a business call program utilizing retired executives that worked part-time and included a research department. The Small Business group provided oversight to the Small Business Development Center Network and certified Woman-owned businesses. The VSBFA administered loans and loan guarantee programs. Workforce Development administered the second oldest state incentive program—grants and in-kind services for worker training.

Of the original 1996 Division Directors, only Preston Wilhelm, VJIP Director, remains with the agency. VJIP celebrated its 40 year anniversary in 2005 with a gala at the Richmond Convention Center.

Supporting the operating divisions was an administrative division that included a special events/marketing manager. From 1996 to the present, VDBA, under its special events director, has sponsored Business Appreciation Week, a major statewide celebration of the contributions businesses provide to the Commonwealth. From 1996 to 2002 DBA also sponsored the Quarterly Economic Development Seminar series.

The Small Business and the VSBFA were split into separate divisions in 1997. The Small Business division was abolished in 2002 and control of Small Business Development Center network passed to George Mason University. The Existing Industry call program was abolished in 2001 and the Research Team abolished in 2002.

Existing Industry Development changed its name to Existing Business Services in 2002 and to Business Information Services in 2007. Workforce Services changed its name to Virginia Jobs Investment Program (VJIP) in 2006.

In 2003, DBA founded the Virginia Business Information Center (VBIC). In 2008, VDBA led the development of the online Business One Stop. VDBA began programs to serve Small, Woman and Minority-owned (SWaM) businesses seeking state contracting opportunities in 2005.

Throughout its brief history, VDBA has taken pride in providing exceptional customer service and adapting to the changing needs of business. The agency has won numerous awards, particularly for training films produced by the VJIP team. VDBA's website is ranked number one by Google in most business search categories. The entrepreneur training programs VDBA has developed have garnered national recognition for their breadth, scope, and effectiveness. Although there have been many calls to merge VDBA with other agencies, its unique blend of programs that serve all businesses in the Commonwealth has enabled the agency to maintain its autonomy.

Past Directors of DBA/VDBA:

David Dickson:	1996-2001
Charlie Mills III	2001-2004
Mike Eisenman	2004-2006
David Ashe	2006
Louisa Strayhorn	2006-2008
Lynda Sharp Anderson	2008-Present

Current VDBA Employees with 30 or more years of continuous service:

Ronald Tignor	VJIP
Stacy VanLeliveld	Admin
Brenda Young`	VJIP